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Sunday Reading.

THE
HARVEST HOME.



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THE
HARVEST HOME.

HOW quickly does joy often succeed
to sorrow; the day of cheerful hope
that of gloomy fear, and the season
plenty and abundance to that of want
and scarcity! Not long since the dearth
of bread in this land was such, that
every countenance seemed to gather
sickness: the very heavens also appear-
ed to frown upon us; for the weather
during a long time was so dismal, that

it threatened to blast the approaching Harvest: we were made to feel that we were in the hands of God, and totally dependant on his mercy; having enjoyed many years of plenty, without interruption, we had learnt to count upon the continuance of the same blessing; and because God's goodness had been so common, we were so much the less thankful for it. How calamitous would a general blight upon our Corn have proved at this season! every mind must shudder at such a thought: such a blight was threatened indeed, but suddenly, and at the very point of time when it was most needed, the weather changed, and a season unusually favourable for getting in the fruits of the earth has succeeded.

Man, it may be remarked, is more ready to pray to God to help him out of his distresses, than to thank him when he has been delivered: for we are often merely selfish in such prayers; we feel a pressing want of the blessing, and we therefore cry to God for it; but when it is obtained our whole end is answered, we now are satisfied; we grow careless about

the matter, and forget to think of our benefactor.

But let us here endeavour to prevent this forgetfulness of our present mercies from taking place in the minds of our readers, and let us invite them to come and contemplate with us that Greatness and Goodness of our Creator which are observable at the time of Harvest.

There is indeed no part of the creation to which we can turn our eyes without meeting with some proofs of the Divine Power and Mercy. Shall we lift up our eyes to the Heavens? There shines the brightness of the sun, which God has placed in the firmament to give light and heat to the world. Shall we wait till the sun is set? then the moon and the stars take up the same language of praise, and all of their Maker's Power and Goodness.

Shall we turn our eyes to the earth? how the surface of it is spread forth like a carpet, decked with every thing to charm the eye, to delight the sense,

and to supply the wants of man. Shall we look upon the great and wide Ocean? There go the ships; and behold even the sea is filled with food for the use of man. "How manifold are thy works, O Lord" "in wisdom hast thou made them all!"

The sight of these common objects of Nature, used often to carry out the holy men of old in praise and adoration to God, of which we will mention an instance in the 65th psalm, because it is applicable to the present time; a psalm penned after a long drought, to which had succeeded some very plentiful and refreshing rains. The psalmist, while he walks abroad, and delights himself with the beautiful appearance of the harvest, and with the prospect of Plenty which is on every side, breaks out in the following thanksgiving to the bountiful Giver of all things. "Praise waiteth for thee, O God! in Sion, and unto thee shall the vow be performed. O thou that didst hear our prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come. — Thou makest the out-goings of the morning

"and

and evening to rejoice. Thou visitest the earth and waterest it. Thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God," for the clouds are compared to a river in the air, sustained by the hand of the Almighty.) "Thou preparest corn when thou hast so provided for it: Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly, thou settlest the furrows thereof, thou makest it soft with showers:" "Thou blessest the springing thereof. Thou crownest the year with thy goodness, and thy paths drop fatness, the little hills rejoice on every side. The pastures are clothed with flocks, the vallies also are covered over with corn; they shout for joy they also sing." To every one who is of the same mind with the psalmist the same kind of meditations will be very apt to occur. Let us, however, here assist the reader, by mentioning a few subjects which he will do well to reflect upon while he takes his walk amidst the reapers, and admires the plenty that is in the fields.

First then, how naturally ought the season of harvest to send our thoughts to

the *great author* of it ! How clearly is His hand at this time seen ! All the power and ingenuity of the whole world cannot frame so much as a single ear of corn. The part which man has in procuring the corn is very small indeed. He in fact does *nothing* himself towards its growth ; he only places the seed in a situation which from experience he has found to be favourable to it, and then “ He goeth away ” and it springeth up he knoweth not how.” The seed which he plants was in the first place given by God : when the sower has put it into the ground, there is then a work, or operation, carried on, in which man is not only unconcerned, but he does not even know how it is accomplished. The grain dies, and from that death a resurrection takes place, a fresh plant arises out of the ground, and this plant is nourished by means of roots hidden within the earth, which then shoot forth without the aid of man : in this secret manner are the different juices collected and sent through the plant : by-and-by the flower blooms ; the ear forms itself ; and the corn takes the proper shape and substance : the rain in the mean time waters it, the dews descend

descend, and the sun shines upon it: till at length it is fit for the use of man. In all this man can do nothing. It is during his absence even that this work is going on. If the grain is blighted, man cannot help it; if it grows too slowly he is not able to quicken it; he can only look on with hope and fear, and watch it in its different stages: he must ascribe all its growth to the unassisted power of the great Creator of all things.

Plain as the hand of the Creator is in the production of the corn, yet such is our natural stupidity, that while we gather the corn we often think no more of God in it, than the very cattle which draw it home. The farmer speaks of his own skill, and labour, and pains. And when the grain is ripe, he lays it up in his barn, with much self applause, and begins to count his gains, not considering that all the praise in fact is due to God, and that every ear which is laid up is a proof man's obligation to his Maker.

But let us here notice also the *largeness*
A 5
of

of the Divine bounty. The works of God are upon a large scale; they are like himself infinite. The works of man are little and insignificant; it is but a small spot which his strength can water, but the showers of Heaven water a whole territory at once. It is but a few acres which the diligent labours of man can make productive; but God causes his sun to shine, and his dew to descend, and the whole earth is rendered fruitful. Look over that beautiful and extensive prospect: See as far as the eye can reach how the fields are crowned with plenty; extend the scene in your imagination, still the same rich view of the Divine bounty presents itself. Cross the wide ocean, and survey the different countries of which the earth consists. In all the varied productions of these different climates, we only meet with more and more signs of the Divine goodness. How are we then called upon to admire and adore that glorious Being who suffers no part of the earth to escape his kind and benignant notice.

With the extensiveness of this bounty let the *continuance* of it be considered.

No

No sooner is the harvest got in, than again the seed is committed to the ground, and again the same scene returns upon us. Let us carry back our thoughts to the years that have been of old. How unwearied has been our Great Benefactor! How unceasing the exertions of his goodness! How many generations have been fed and supported by it! Seasons have changed, but they have only presented different views of the Lord's mercy; and the cold of winter, the bloom of spring, the heat of summer, and the fruits of autumn, have each in their seasons manifested the same bounty and care of our Creator.

Having indulged in these pleasing reflections upon the Divine bounty, it seems proper in the next place to turn our attention to a more melancholy subject, I mean *our unworthiness of it*. For whom does the Lord open his stores. and provide with so liberal a hand? For a race of creatures who are touched with the most lively sense of his goodness, and love and honour him in proportion to these great obligations?

Do we then hear the reapers, while they cut down the corn, speaking good of the name of the Lord, and blessing him for his kindness to the children of men? Hark! is it the hymns of praise, which they are chanting in yonder field? Is the song they sing that song of the psalmist which has just been spoken of? Methinks instead of it some song, full of profaneness and obscenity, is sung aloud. The name of God indeed is on many lips, but it is only that it may be trifled with or blasphemed. What then, are these men gathering God's bounty, and in the same moment profaning his name? But follow them to the harvest home: Surely now at least they meet and offer up their prayer and thanksgiving, and while God is in the act of crowning the year with his bounty, each tongue is loud in talking of his mercy, and each grateful heart is swelling with his praise. It is commonly reported, that there is no season of the year in which so much wickedness and drunkenness prevail among the farmers, as in that of bringing the harvest home. Are these then the returns which in this year also we are making to the Divine goodness? Is all our
complaining

complaining of want, and our prayer to God for deliverance, to end in a drunken abuse of the mercies he so wonderfully bestows?

But not to dwell on vices which are so great, that we would willingly hope they must only be the vices of a few, let us a little consider also the *general* unworthiness of mankind. Who are they that will be fed by this abundant harvest? Will no idle persons be maintained by it? Will no sinners have their strength sustained, so as to continue their life of sin? Will there be none who will eat with unthankfulness? None who, as the reapers have reaped it without thinking of the Author of the harvest, will in like manner feed upon it without thinking of the Author of their food? Again, will no discontented, murmuring, repining people be fed by this goodness of the Lord? Will all those, in short, whose life is prolonged by the bread now sent them, devote that life to the service of him who prolonged it? Surely if we could remove ourselves to a distance from the earth, and become by any means impartial judges between God and man, we should stand astonished at

at the present rebellion of the creature. He who made man, He who supports him, sending him the very bread which he eats, has a right to his services: and hath made him no doubt for his own glory. Methinks if any of us were endowed with power to create some little rational animal, inferior to ourselves, and if, after having breathed into him the breath of life, we also daily clothed and nourished him, we should expect his obedience and constant service in return; and if, after all, such a being should presume to set up for himself, and pretend to have a will of his own, and break all the laws we had given him, we should be ready methinks to stamp our foot upon him, and to crush him to death at once, for not fulfilling the ends of his creation. We should have no patience with such a little insolent and rebellious animal. And yet God has patience with us, notwithstanding all our forgetfulness of the ends for which we were born, and our unthankfulness for the daily returns of his bounty. Nay, though we go on abusing his mercies, he goes on cloathing the pastures with his flocks. The vallies also are again covered over with

with corn; again they shout, for joy they
 also sing. O let us be ashamed of the
 baseness of our ingratitude, and repent in
 the name of Christ, before the day of his
 vengeance is come upon us.

The season of harvest is also one which
 should lead us particularly to reflect on
 our *dependence upon God*. God gave us
 life at first. He causes our blood to flow,
 our heart to beat, and our stomach to dis-
 tribute the nourishment. He too supplies
 the food we eat, of whatever kind it be.
 We may combine together different meats;
 we may dress them in a variety of ways,
 but we can create nothing: God is the
 only giver of life and food, and all things:
 and happy is that man who lives in the
 lively remembrance of this, who accepts
 all his comforts as from the hand of the
 great God, habitually feeling that he has
 not of himself power to subsist for a single
 moment, or to procure, independent of
 God, one single drop of water, or grain
 of bread. And this sense of our depend-
 ence is not a duty only, it is a great com-
 fort also: for how does it tend to relieve
 that anxiety, which is so natural to us,
 about

about our subsistence in the time to come. The more we remember that we are the creatures of God, so much the more shall we trust to him to provide for his large family, even as a child trusts to the care and prudence of his parent. "Behold the fowls of the air, they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feedeth them."

Next to this sense of our dependence, *gratitude* to God may be mentioned as peculiarly becoming. Methinks at this time not only the heavens above, but the earth beneath, calls aloud upon us to be thankful.—Every field, every ear of corn, seems to bid us speak the praises of God.—How do these glorify him, as it were, by an expressive though dumb offering of praise!—But Man has a tongue with which he can speak forth the praises of his Maker. It is for the sake of Man also that the store house of Divine bounty is opened; it is for Man that the pastures are clothed with flocks, and the vallies covered with corn; it is for Man that the sun shines, and the showers descend.

end. From him then should the offer-
g of praise continually rise up.

“But why will you suppose mankind
to be so unthankful?” Methinks I hear
me one reply, “Do you think we
do not know as well as you that we
ought to praise God for a good harvest?
There will always indeed be a few
wicked people in the land, but in ge-
neral we understand well enough that
it is God who sends us bread, and all
our mercies: nay, when any of us speak
of having got a good crop, ‘*Thank*
God’ is the very phrase that is quite
common in our lips.”—I admit it is so,
and I hope indeed that many thousand
arts have already offered up the sincere
tribute of thanksgiving for the present
bountiful season. But we cannot help
saying here, that there is a way far be-
yond that of simple praise, by which true
gratitude will manifest itself. It will
speak out not in words only but in deeds,
deeds I mean of obedience to him to-
wards whom the gratitude is felt. What
could any father think of the gratitude
of a child, or any husband of the grati-
tude

tude of a wife, which never shewed itself in any thing else but a few warm expressions of obligation. No, it is by the readiness and activity in serving the person praised, and by the desire in all respects to please him, that the disposition to gratitude must be judged of. A man may say, "*Thank God*" twenty times a day, and yet never truly thank him in his heart. Words are cheap. Many men think to pay God off, as it were, by this sort of coin. Let it be remarked also, that there is a satisfaction and self-complacency which are naturally felt on receiving abundance of wealth into our lap: we are put into good-humour by it, and when we are reminded that God is the author of our prosperity, the truth of this is so plain that we cannot deny it, and since our understandings agree to the observation, we fancy that our hearts agree also; whereas, in fact, we only *judge* that God *ought* to be thanked, but we do not thank him, and as to the good-humour we are in, it arises merely from our being well pleased with ourselves, or with the enjoyments which God has given us, and not from our
being

it- ing well pleased with God. That we
 rm- practise some such frauds as these on
 by- ourselves is but too plain; for mark
 the- now what follows. When the same per-
 all- son who has been thanking God so often
 ion- for his mercies, is by-and-by called to
 nan- do something, to suffer something, or
 s a- give up something for the sake of
 u in- serving this gracious Being to whom he
 nen- professed such prodigious gratitude, he
 this- then either too idle, or too selfish, or
 lso, too much governed by the opinion of
 om- his fellow creatures, or some way or
 re- ever too full of excuses to do what is
 our- wanted of him: on the other hand, when
 by- some temptation comes in his way he
 God- yields to it, and sins against the same
 ruth- as freely as if he were under no
 deny- obligation to him. Let us then beware
 gree- of this hypocritical sort of gratitude,
 our- which we cannot deceive God, though
 we- often delude ourselves by it. Let us
 ked, set forth his praise not only with our
 the- but with our lives. Let us shew
 rely- our sense of his goodness by doing his will,
 our- reading his word, by attending his
 high- worship, by readily denying ourselves
 our- for his sake, and in short by laying our
 being- out

our lives in his service, and by standing forth to promote his cause in a disobedient and unthankful world.

Here let it be hinted also, that this may be a good time for laying down our plans for using the plenty which is flowing in to us. God has now given us provision for another year, but for what purpose has he given it? In order that we may eat and drink, and be merry? What then have we not immortal souls? The great end of our Creator is, that we may serve him in this world, and may be prepared to dwell with him for ever in heaven. His direction is, that we should employ our health and strength, and all our vigour of body and mind, in fulfilling his will, that we should seek in the first place to know God, and Jesus Christ, whom he has sent into the world, and having learnt to know him, that we should then act in our several stations from the motive of love to his name, imitating also his bounty, by ministering to the necessities of our fellow creatures. Are these then our ends of living? Is this what we propose to ourselves? Are these the views with which

reap the harvest? Are we determined
 at none of it, as far as in us lies, shall
 be wasted in riot or in luxury, or in im-
 provident consumption? Do we look for-
 ward to it as to a treasure, with which the
 hungry shall be fed, and the poor be sa-
 tisfied? Then indeed we may rejoice in
 the bounty of Heaven, and we may rea-
 sonably trust, that all the expressions of
 gratitude in our lips are sincere.

Again, let the consideration of the
 goodness of God, displayed in the fruits
 of the earth, raise our minds to the con-
 sideration of those still greater mercies
 which he is able and willing to give us.
 It is with him a small matter to provide
 the earth with food, or to take care of the
 needy. See what a rich provision he has
 made for our souls—for them he has not
 spared his only begotten Son, but given
 him up to be the propitiation for our sins!
 For the sake of the soul he has sent his
 Holy Spirit into the world, to guide men
 to the knowledge of truth. For the soul
 he has prepared an eternal harvest of
 blessings, “an inheritance which is in-
 corruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth
 not

" not away, reserved in heaven for us. We may learn to value spiritual mercies from what we see of temporal ones. Temporal ones strike the senses, and being suited to our present fallen nature, are more apt to fill our hearts with joy and gratitude. But we may rest assured that the blessings, which God has provided for the soul, are much superior to those provided for the body, as the soul is to the body, and as eternity is to time. Let us then turn from this earthly scene of abundance to still nobler and larger blessings. Let the fields not only preach to us the immense goodness of our Creator, but let them send our thoughts also to the " unsearchable riches that are in Christ. Let the harvest serve to impress a thoughtless world with wonder, gratitude, reverence, and love to Him who is the author, not of all our earthly treasures only, but of all the blessings of eternity! In short, let the goodness of God lead us all to repentance, and let each of us take care that the mercies of his Maker be not turned into a curse, by rendering our hearts only so much the more full of this world, and more indifferent to the blessings of the Gospel.

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